

Bush Warns Moscow of U.S. Move Over Cut in Fuel for Lithuanians

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WASHINGTON, April 17 — President Bush warned Moscow today that he would retaliate for a cut in fuel shipments to Lithuania, and officials said possible responses ranged from canceling official meetings and educational exchanges to stalling talks on a variety of trade issues.

That could affect negotiations on civil aviation, trade, investment and tax treaties and maritime transportation that grew out of the Malta summit meeting and that the Soviet Union is anxious to conclude, officials said. But they said the White House was not prepared to cancel the summit meeting between Mr. Bush and President Mikhail S. Gorbachev, planned for May 30 to June 3.

Mr. Bush summoned his top advisers, including Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney and Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser, to the White House this evening to discuss reports from Moscow that the Lithuanian government had been told that its natural gas shipments would be reduced.

Watching 'Very Closely'

Before the meeting, Mr. Bush called the move "contrary to the approach that we have urged and that others have urged upon the Soviet Union."

"Obviously, we are watching this situation very, very closely," Mr. Bush said. "We are considering appropriate responses if these threats are implemented."

But the President refused to elaborate on his comments and concluded by repeating his plea for "dialogue, discussion and a peaceful resolution of this great difficulty" in Lithuania. The republic's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union prompted a test of wills that has strained Soviet-American relations just as they seemed to be steadily improving.

The President raised the issue of Lithuania today at a brief photography

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session in the Oval Office before a meeting with President Rafael Callejas of Honduras. This departure from his usual practice in such meetings signaled that the White House was anxious not to appear to be inactive when President Mikhail S. Gorbachev was increasing the pressure on the Lithuanians.

Mr. Bush refused to say what particular options he was considering and other Administration officials also were careful to avoid making specific threats toward the Soviet Union, in part because they are concerned about inflaming already high tensions in the Soviet Union and in part because the Administration believes that in the final analysis, there is little it could do.

Some officials also have argued that taking any action, even the most innocuous, could increase public expectations that Mr. Bush would respond more harshly if the Soviet Union cracked down further on Lithuania and thus propel the Administration toward

actions it might not want to take.

Mr. Bush has come under pressure from some members of Congress to take more forceful action. But after a White House meeting today, Senator George Mitchell, the Democratic leader, signaled that he was satisfied so far with the President's approach and declined to say how he thought Mr. Bush should respond to Moscow's latest move.

Speaking in an interview with Cable News Network, President Vytautas Landsbergis of Lithuania also declined to say what he thought Mr. Bush should do. He said only that the United States should make clear that the "Soviet Union has no right in Lithuania, no constitutional or lawful rights."

Administration officials said the list of possible responses if Moscow carried out its threat of economic sanctions against Lithuania were reviewed at an interagency meeting here today.

The mildest measures would involve canceling such things as official visits or programs like educational and cultural exchanges. Officials acknowl-

edged that such action is unlikely to hurt Mr. Gorbachev or the Soviet leadership much and that it might be considered inadequate by those who have been pressing Mr. Bush to act more strongly.

Economic Area Responses

If Mr. Bush decided on a tougher response, officials said he had the option of suspending or canceling a range of discussions that are planned in the near future on trade and economic initiatives that Mr. Bush offered to Mr. Gorbachev in Malta last December.

"In all reality, the most likely response would be in the economic area, since that's the most logical and has the least widespread potential damage," one official said.

In the next several weeks, the Soviet Union and the United States are scheduled to begin a third round of talks on a trade agreement and to open negotiations on expanded civil aviation, maritime transportation and proposed treaties covering investment and tax arrangements.

At Malta, Mr. Bush also pledged to help the Soviet Union gain the status of

observer in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade starting in 1991, to work for the lifting of export-import credits and to pursue expanded cooperation in finance, agriculture and other areas. The Soviet-American grain agreement also is on the Lithuanian contingency list, officials said.

'Good, the Bad and the Ugly'

In considering its options, an official said, "The Administration is focusing on this aspect of the relationship first."

There is strong resistance within the Administration to allowing Lithuania to interfere with the summit, officials said.

"A lot of people want to go through with that summit," an official said. "Any relationship is a mixed thing. There's the good, the bad and the ugly, and you don't sacrifice everything because you have tensions in one area."

Administration officials argued that the summit should proceed as scheduled since, as one put it, "it serves a certain function in itself by putting things on the agenda, keeping on the pressure and allowing the relationship to go forward."